

The Drums of War

A Romance of the Franco-Prussian Death Grapple

By H. DE VERE STACPOOLE

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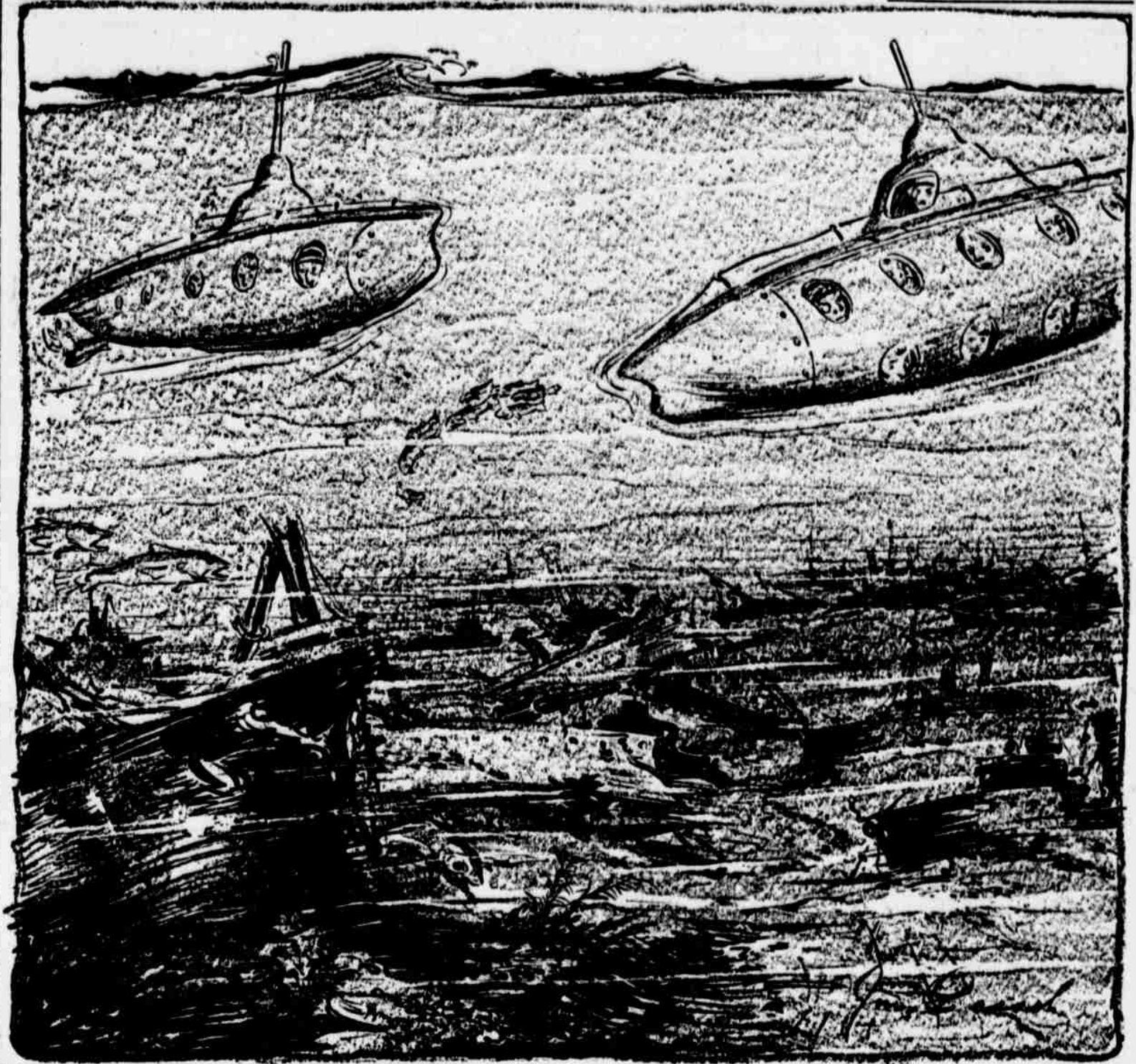
British Naval Review, 1915.

By J. H. Cassel

NEXT WEEK'S COMPLETE NOVEL IN THE EVENING WORLD

THE TIME LOCK

By CHARLES E. WALK



CHAPTER XXI.

(Continued.)

Margaret.

W

HY, indeed! Just, I suppose,

because I was a woman,

filled with a woman's

caprice; and the masquer-

ade amused me—and how

you evaded me! I was invited to meet

you at dinner."

And I dined at the Cafe de Paris

with a fool."

Just so. And you ran away to

Nips. Then the idea came to me—

Ah, yes, it was a fine idea—I will

make him meet me. And I slipped

on the shoulder with a glove."

"Yes; when I was seated in the box

at the opera with a lady."

"Yes. Who was the lady? I was

so excited to see any one but you."

"She was—" Then I paused.

And then I said—why, I can never tell

"She was a friend of my guardian."

"Next morning I received your

challenge. How I laughed to my-

self!"

"But tell me one thing. Why did

you stipulate for a delay of three

months before the duel?"

She laughed again.

"I shall tell you."

"Yes."

"Because I wanted time—to—"

"Yes."

"To let my hair grow. Do you like

it?" She drew a long pin from her

hat, removed her hat and showed

her perfect head and the coils of

light-black hair.

"What! Do I like it?"

"Well, I like it."

"We must never part again."

"We never parted," said she. "I am

sorry to say, but I have been in the

world. The Baron Carl von Lichten-

berg is dead; he died when I put

in these things. There is no one to

trouble us."

"Look!" I said. "This is Etienne."

I had as completely forgotten Fran-

z and Etienne as though they had

never existed. Etienne, who was in

the world, and the Pavilion a place

which I recognized, but which had

no part in my new life.

Sitting opposite to me, companion

of the table, for I had a dejeuner under

the big chestnut tree—I could com-

template her at my leisure. Surely

God had never created a more lovely

and perfect woman. Etienne, too, I

saw black, upturned and tipped with

brown; violet-gray eyes. Ah, yes; I

do not care to think of them now. I

only care to remember that voice, all

that sweetness, and she was there,

entirely and forever. We were be-

yond convention and law, as were

Adam and Eve.

"And you thought," said she, as if

reading my thoughts, "I am nobody—

I have not even a name. Yesterday I

was Baron Carl von Lichtenberg,

and my great estate—she opened

a purse, in which lay a few louis.

"Here they are."

I laughed, and put the little purse

into my pocket.

"Tell me," I said, "where were you

when you were coming out of your

chrysalis? When you were changing

all these three months?"

"I was at Tours. The Baron von

Lichtenberg received three months'

foreign leave, and went to Tours.

Oh, the complications! And the dress-

makers! I did not even know at first

how to wear these things. Do they fit

me?"

I rose, and we crossed the draw-

bridge. As she passed over it, she

paused and gazed at the water.

"How good it looks! How dark and

deep! Do you remember the pool at

Lichtenberg?"

And how I pushed you in. Do you

remember the little drum in the

house? The little drum with the golden

head—Etienne, he called you Toto. I

have always called you Toto since. M.

Patrick Mahon.

"Call me that still," I said. "I love

something that reminds me of my past

—of our past. Come, let us go into

the woods, as we went that day."

She laughed at the suggestion of

the little Frenchman's greediness.

to the tall pine—the fragrant pine,

whose song sounds for ever like the

sea on a distant strand—we sat down

on a bank, which in spring would be

mist-blue with violets.

"I have never kissed any one before.

Have you?" she asked.

"No one."

"Never loved any one?" She rested

her hands on my shoulders, and

looked into my eyes.

"Never."

"For," said she, "if you had—"

"Yes."

"I don't know. Sometimes I do not

know my own thoughts. Sometimes

I act and do things that seem strange

to me afterward. I made you meet

this morning out of caprice. I

loved you following you as I did to

Nips, dressed as I was, from caprice.

That is not me. There is something

wicked and wayward in me that I

cannot understand. Had it not been

for me you would not have killed that

man this morning."

I had not thought of De Coligny till

now; and the remembrance of him

lying there dead in the arms of Dr.

Pons came like a gloomy stain across

my mind. But it soon passed.

"We would have fought in any

case," said I, "inevitably."

She smiled, as if relieved.

"He was a man, she said. "He

deserved to die for the things he said

about you to me. It was partly on

that account that I arranged all that

this morning, so that I might meet

him before those men; but I never

thought it would end as it did."

"Do you know," said I, "when I

killed him it was as if the blood which

I shed had baptised me into a new

life. My full love for you only came

then. It was as if some spirit out of

the past that had loved you for ages

had suddenly been born completely."

"Don't!" she said. "I hate to think

of that. Let the past be gone forever.

You are yourself, alive and warm.

You are my sun, my life, the air I

breathe. You have been kept for me

untouched. Oh, how I love you!"

"Listen!" she said, freeing her lips

from mine, and casting her beautiful

eyes upward. "No; it is not the wind.

Ah! listen! listen!"

From the trees came a sound that

was not the voice of the birds. Far

away it seemed now, and now near. It

was the spinning-song of Oberthal,

that tune, thin as a thread of flax, ris-

ing, falling, poignant as Fate, and

filled with the story of mine and

his swaddling clothes, his marriage-bed,

and his shroud.

There, amid the trees, coming

from now and then, the sound of

the wood—for a wood is a living

echo—heard just then, the song of

Oberthal seemed the voice of Fate

calling to me.

I knew quite well what had hap-

pened. Franzus had returned. Mme.

Ancelet had told him that I was in

the wood. Whistling, no doubt, to find

me. He had been looking for me—

the old tune that he knew I liked

so well. It was then only that my

past relationship with Etienne rose be-

fore me.

I had said nothing about it; he had

even refrained from mentioning her

name. I had done this from no ul-

terior motive. I might have known

that the woman I loved should know

about Etienne. Had I not brought her

to the Pavilion when it was quite

possible for her to see me? I could

bring them both up and introduce

them. Their love for one another

and their happiness was so evident

that it would be an explanation in it-

self.

I ran toward them.

Etienne was radiant; Franzus as

brown as a berry.

"Etienne," I cried, as I kissed her

and welcomed her hands, "do you

remember little Carl? Do you re-

member little Carl? He is here; he is

here; he is here; he is here; he is

here; he is here; he is here; he is

here; he is here; he is here; he is

here; he is here; he is here; he is

here; he is here; he is here; he is

here; he is here; he is here; he is

here; he is here; he is here; he is

which was in the hall. The servant

opened the door for me and told me

they were in the library, and I ran

there to meet them.

"Toto," cried Etienne; then, holding

me at a little distance and staring at

me as though I were a ghost: "What

has happened to you?"

I caught a reflection of myself in

the mirror above the fireplace, and

for the first time I recognized the

change in myself. Haggard, white and

drawn, my face was no longer the

face of a young man.

"Never mind me," I replied. "Why

have you left Etienne? Have you any

news?"

"My friend," said Franzus, answer-

ing for her, "there is no news—only

news of war."

"Ah, yes," I said. "War. But tell

me why you have left Etienne. What

is a Prussian?"

"Return?"

"To my own country."

"You are leaving me?"

There was silence for a moment,

and Etienne began to weep.

"Toto, can you see?"

"Ah, yes," I said. "I can see—

everything is going from me. Don't

cry, Etienne; I can see. Franzus, for-

give me, I forgot. I did not know

what war meant now."

I ordered a carriage to the door, and

accompanied them to the station, through

streets packed and crowded

as if by some fate.

I came back on foot. It was a long

way, and as I walked the crowded

cafes, the crowds of excited and fever-

stricken people, it seemed to me that

I was in a city whose inhabitants had

at one stroke gone mad.

I found myself, for the first time in

many days, able to note the things

around me, and to take some interest

in them. The great upheaval had

shaken me in part away from my own

special preoccupation, the grief of the

parting with Etienne and Franzus had

obscured in part that other grief

which had pursued me.

The great city had been stirred to

the uttermost depths, as the great sea

is sometimes stirred by a submarine

explosion. Dregs came to the sur-

face and foisted as foam; and I saw

what I had never seen before: terrible

people, cast up from the purities

and the acme, dog men and beast-

men, bayoneted dead, bayoneted

alive, bayoneted in the streets, bay-

oneted in the streets, bayoneted in

the streets, bayoneted in the streets,

bayoneted in the streets, bayoneted

in the streets, bayoneted in the

streets, bayoneted in the streets,

bayoneted in the streets, bayoneted

the Prussian cock-pot to the guns

that were to batter down Paris.

I have said little about my social

life in Paris, but I have indicated, I

think, that my guardian and I were

friends of the Emperor; and I men-

tioned it as a strange fact, and a fact

that casts volumes of light on his

character, that now, in my desola-

tion, deserted by my guardian, de-

serted by every one I loved, the image

of Napoleon arose before me as a

person I would like to speak to. You

know just what my friends and I were

generally amongst our friends, some

good men or good women, to whom

we go when in affliction for a word of

consolation, or even just to feel their

presence. We look in and see them,

even though we may say nothing of

our troubles. Moved by this instinct,

I looked in and saw the Emperor.

To get near the Tuilleries was

a difficult business, and even to

pass the Cent Gardes at the gate; but

I got in, and I saw the Emperor.

The Emperor had come to Paris

from the Council at Saint Cloud, held

the night before. I do not know

whether the Emperor accompanied

him or not; but he was in the palace,